United Nations CRC/C/OPSC/USA/CO/3-4

Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth reports submitted by the United States of America under article 12 (1) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*

I. Introduction

1. The Committee considered the combined third and fourth periodic reports of the United States of America (CRC/C/OPSC/USA/3-4) at its 2197th meeting (see CRC/C/SR.2197), held on 16 May 2017, and adopted the present concluding observations at its 2221st meeting, held on 2 June 2017.

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the report of the State party and the written replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/OPSC/USA/Q/3-4/Add.1). The Committee expresses appreciation for the constructive dialogue held with the multisectoral delegation of the State party.

3. The Committee reminds the State party that the present concluding observations should be read in conjunction with the concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports submitted by the State party under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC/C/OPAC/CO/3-4), adopted on 2 June 2017.

II. General observations

Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the various measures taken by the State party in areas relevant to the implementation of the Optional Protocol, including:

(a) The enactment on 29 May 2015 of the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act;

(b) The enactment on 29 September 2014 of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act;

(c) The enactment on 7 March 2013 of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act.

5. The Committee notes with appreciation the progress achieved in the creation of institutions and the adoption of national plans and programmes that facilitate the implementation of the Optional Protocol, including:

* Adopted by the Committee at its seventy-fifth session (15 May-2 June 2017).

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(a) The adoption in April 2016 of the National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction;

(b) The establishment in 2015 of the Office on Trafficking in Persons under the Administration for Children and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services;

(c) The adoption of the Federal Strategic Action Plan on Services for Victims of Human Trafficking in the United States for 2013-2017.

III. Data

Data collection

6. The Committee welcomes the establishment of various databases at the federal level, in particular the databases on crimes committed on the Internet and on victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It notes the State party's information that data under the Optional Protocol is also collected by numerous agencies and institutions of the State party and that state, territorial, tribal and local governments all have jurisdiction in the area and use different data systems and different definitions of offences. At the same time, the Committee is concerned that the existing data collection systems provide no reliable or complete and disaggregated data concerning all the areas covered by the Optional Protocol. In that regard, it reiterates its concerns expressed in the previous concluding observations (see CRC/C/OPSC/USA/CO/2, para. 7) regarding:

(a) The lack of progress on establishing an effective national data collection system on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography that could be shared by federal, state and local authorities, which currently use many different data systems;

(b) Insufficient research and evidence-based policy and programme analysis centred on children and the root causes of the crimes affecting them, and the fact that existing research and analysis focuses overwhelmingly on trafficking for sexual exploitation and little on the sale of children for the purpose of forced labour and other offences covered by the Optional Protocol;

(c) Difficulties arising from considering as trafficking a wide range of criminal activities against children in the collection of data and analytical information, including the offences covered by the Optional Protocol. This also leads to misconceptions and variations in the identification of child victims and of appropriate strategies to prevent and combat such crimes at the national, state, local and international levels.

7. **The Committee urges the State party, as recommended in its previous concluding observations (see CRC/C/OPSC/USA/CO/2, para. 8), to strengthen its efforts to:**

(a) **Develop and implement a comprehensive and systematic data collection system, including for analysis, monitoring and impact assessment, covering all areas provided for in the Optional Protocol and all territories of mainland United States as well as the insular areas and other dependent areas over which the State party exercises sovereignty. The Committee further recommends that data should be disaggregated, inter alia, by sex, age, nationality, ethnic origin, socioeconomic background, disability and geographical area and should also focus on children placed at specific risk of becoming victims of the offences covered by the Optional Protocol, such as unaccompanied foreign children, children accompanying their migrant families, child labourers, the homeless and children in street situations. The Committee also recommends that the State party establish common indicators for data collection to be used at the federal and state levels;**

(b) **Support and establish partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic centres to conduct in-depth studies on root causes of the crimes affecting children and on the extent and impact of protection measures and programmes, covering sexual as well as labour exploitation and other situations affecting children including poverty and marginalization;**

(c) **Consider clarifying, for purposes of data collection as well as for the planning and development of policies and programmes covering all areas of the Optional Protocol, the definitions of offences in line with articles 2, 3 and 10 of the Optional Protocol and differentiating between child and adult victims, and ensuring consistency of their use by legislators, service providers, law enforcement officials and the general public at the federal, state and local levels.**

IV. General measures of implementation

General principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12)

Legislation

8. While welcoming the legislative developments mentioned in paragraph 4 of the present document, the Committee is concerned that the State party's legislation focuses overwhelmingly on trafficking of persons for sexual purposes, while some other offences relating to the sale of children, as defined in articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol, remain insufficiently addressed. The Committee also regrets the lack of harmonization with regard to the age of the child between federal and state legislation and among states.

9. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure that, at a minimum, the definition of the sale of children, which is similar to but not identical to trafficking in persons, is fully covered under the national legislation in order to implement adequately the provision on sale contained in the Optional Protocol;**

(b) **Ensure harmonization between federal and state laws regarding the age of the child, establishing full protection up to 18 years.**

Comprehensive policy and strategy

10. While welcoming a number of strategies and plans of action adopted by the State party to address child exploitation and human trafficking, the Committee regrets the lack of a comprehensive strategy covering all areas under the Optional Protocol, including all forms of sale of children addressed in articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol, in particular the sale of children for the purposes of labour exploitation, the sale of organs and improperly inducing consent, as an intermediary, for adoption.

11. **The Committee recommends that the State party develop a comprehensive strategy aimed at addressing not only sexual exploitation and trafficking but also all other offences covered under the Optional Protocol, and that it provide adequate human, technical and financial resources for its implementation. In doing so, the State party should pay particular attention to prevention, prohibition of offences and rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims, in accordance with the provisions of the Optional Protocol taking into account the outcomes of the World Congresses against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.**

Coordination and evaluation

12. The Committee welcomes the appointment of a National Coordinator for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction in the Department of Justice Office of the Deputy Attorney General. However, the Committee is concerned that the National Coordinator lacks sufficient authority to coordinate activities among federal, state and local authorities and with NGOs working in the area.

13. **The Committee recommends that the State party provide the National Coordinator with sufficient authority and extend his or her mandate in order to establish coordination policies and mechanisms among states and among federal, state and local authorities working on the implementation of all provisions of the Optional**

Protocol. It also recommends that government agencies at all levels coordinate their activities with NGOs working in the area.

Dissemination, awareness-raising

14. The Committee welcomes the continuous efforts undertaken by the State party to raise awareness through various campaigns, including the Blue Campaign of the Department of Homeland Security and the #WhatIWouldMiss social media campaign of the Department of Education, among others. The Committee is however concerned that the campaigns focus mostly on human trafficking and neglect other offences under the Optional Protocol.

15. **The Committee reiterates its recommendation from the previous concluding observations (see CRC/C/OPSC/CO/2, para. 18) that the State party:**

(a) **Make all provisions of the Optional Protocol widely known to the public, particularly to children and their families, by, inter alia, developing and implementing specific long-term awareness-raising programmes, at the national and state levels, and including the provisions of the Optional Protocol into school curricula at all levels of the education system using appropriate material created specifically for children;**

(b) **In cooperation with civil society and the media, intensify and promote awareness among the public at large of the need to prevent and combat crimes under the Optional Protocol, focusing on children who are particularly at risk of becoming victims and their parents, and encouraging the participation of the community, in particular that of children including child victims of both sexes.**

Training

16. **The Committee welcomes the State party's information that it provides training in all areas related to the Optional Protocol to all persons and institutions that come into contact with children and recommends that the State party, while continuing its training activities, assess regularly their effectiveness and impact on prevention of offences under the Optional Protocol and protection of children.**

Allocation of resources

17. The Committee takes note of the information provided by the State party concerning budget allocations for various activities aimed at implementation of the Optional Protocol. However, the Committee regrets that some areas covered by the Optional Protocol, such as eliminating demand for child sexual services, receive insignificant budgetary allocations. The Committee is also concerned about the lack of information on the evaluation of effectiveness, efficiency, equity and transparency in resource allocation for the implementation of the Optional Protocol.

18. **In the light of its general comment No. 19 on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights, the Committee recommends that the State party provide sufficient and identifiable budget allocations for implementation of all areas covered by the Optional Protocol and assess the impact of budget allocations on effectiveness, efficiency, equity and transparency in resource allocation for the implementation of the Optional Protocol.**

V. Prevention of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (art. 9 (1) and (2))

Measures adopted to prevent offences prohibited under the Protocol

19. The Committee notes the information provided by the State party on its efforts to prevent offences under the Optional Protocol through awareness-raising activities, research into root causes, legislation, forums and others (see paras. 31-36 of the State party report). However, the Committee is concerned that:

(a) The preventive measures are overwhelmingly focused on tertiary prevention, i.e. after the victims were exposed to sexual or labour exploitation, aimed at children known to be or suspected of being victims of offences, and not sufficiently on secondary prevention, i.e. earlier intervention before damage has occurred, or on primary prevention, i.e. keeping children from being victimized;

(b) Efforts to eliminate demand for children's sexual services remain insufficient and buyers enjoy impunity despite the existing legal provisions allowing for their prosecution;

(c) Education of children both in school and out of school on risks of offences under the Optional Protocol is insufficient, despite some efforts of the Department of Education;

(d) Preventive efforts targeting children who are particularly at risk of becoming victims of the offences under the Optional Protocol remain insufficient. Those children include children living in poverty; migrant children; children living in difficult family situations; including runaway and homeless children; Native American children, especially girls; boys who tend to be runaways or abandoned; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children; adolescent girls; and "in-system" children.

20. **The Committee urges the State party to:**

(a) **Prioritize primary and secondary prevention measures and ensure that its prevention strategies are not only reactive but also aim at preventing the harm from happening altogether;**

(b) **Take measures to change attitudes and perception regarding child prostitution and child pornography aimed at eliminating the demand for children's sexual services and build capacity of its law enforcement officers and the judiciary in order to increase investigations, prosecution and punishment of buyers of children's sexual services;**

(c) **Increase efforts aimed at providing age-appropriate education of children at all schools and out of school facilities on risks of offences under the Optional Protocol, including by increasing resources and support to the Department of Education for this purpose;**

(d) **Strengthen its efforts towards informing and protecting children in vulnerable situations — including children living in poverty; migrant children; children living in difficult family situations, including runaway and homeless children; Native American children, especially girls; boys who tend to be runaways or abandoned; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children; adolescent girls; and "in-system" children — from falling victims of crimes covered under the Optional Protocol.**

Economic exploitation of children

21. While noting the information provided by the State party concerning its legislation and other efforts against forced and child labour, the Committee is concerned that:

(a) The State party's legislation concerning trafficking, including the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act and Trafficking Victims Protection Act, addresses mainly trafficking for sexual purposes and does not sufficiently address the trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation;

(b) Burden of proof of "force, fraud or coercion" under the legislation against trafficking imposes heavy evidential burden on the victims of child labour;

(c) Insufficient regulation of the working conditions of children aged 14 and 15 years in agriculture, including the absence of the requirement for parental consent, which has reportedly led to grave violations of the rights of children, including unlimited working hours in hazardous conditions amounting to servitude;

(d) The Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labour tasked with identifying unlawful labour practices is reportedly under-resourced and does not prioritize the prevention of child labour;

(e) The efforts to identify child victims of trafficking for economic exploitation are limited in part due to the lack of training of professionals who come into contact with such children;

(f) The State party lacks data on child victims of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation;

(g) Unaccompanied migrant children often become victims of trafficking for child labour in order to pay off the cost of their journey to the territory of the State party.

22. **The Committee urges the State party to take active measures to prevent the sale of children for the purpose of child labour by, inter alia, amending the legislation to cover modern forms of servitude related to child labour and ensure that the burden of proof at all times lies on the perpetrator and not on the exploited children, who do not have the capacity nor maturity to consent to being sold for that purpose. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt a coordinated strategy and a dedicated budget for combating the worst forms of child labour, especially in the agricultural sector;**

(b) **Review and revise laws at the federal and state levels to ensure that the minimum age of 16 years also applies to agriculture with or without parental consent;**

(c) **Strengthen the human, technical and financial resources of the Department of Labour, in particular the Wage and Hour Division, to ensure that inspections, monitoring, mediation and conciliation are undertaken to free children from economic exploitation and reintegrate them into society with full enjoyment of their rights;**

(d) **Review policies and improve standards regarding United States industries and businesses that hire children both in and outside the country in order to prevent worst forms of child labour, including in agriculture, some manufacturing industries, childcare and the service sectors;**

(e) **Collect data on the number, sex, age and origin of children, the conditions of work and life, the impact on their rights and development and improve records related to child labour;**

(f) **Ensure that child labour legislation also specifically focuses on unaccompanied foreign children brought into or arriving in the country for purposes amounting to economic exploitation;**

(g) **Consider ratifying International Labour Organization Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).**

Adoption

23. **The Committee notes that the 2012 Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act extended safeguards provided by accreditation to children being adopted from countries that are not parties to the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption. In that regard, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure that its practice in adoption excludes any possibility of sale of children as prohibited in articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol, in particular by prohibiting payments to birth mothers to induce their consent;**

(b) **Ensure effective and systematic accreditation and monitoring of all individuals and entities dealing with adoptions directly or as intermediaries, consider limiting their number, and ensure that adoption processes do not result in financial gains to any party;**

(c) **Adequately and effectively implement the Hague Convention in order to curb the instances of sale of children for international adoption purposes;**

(d) **Train and monitor social workers and case managers on adoption laws and regulations.**

Surrogate motherhood

24. While noting that surrogate motherhood is a complex area that raises many different questions that fall outside the scope of the Optional Protocol, the Committee is nevertheless concerned that widespread commercial use of surrogacy in the State party may lead, under certain circumstances, to the sale of children. The Committee is particularly concerned about the situations when parentage issues are decided exclusively on a contractual basis at pre-conception or pre-birth stage.

25. **The Committee recommends, in the light of articles 1 and 2 of the Optional Protocol, that the State party consider the possibility of developing legislation that would address the issue of sale of children that may take place in the context of surrogate motherhood and that is outside the scope of family law.**

Child sex tourism

26. The Committee welcomes the measures taken by the State party to combat child sex tourism both within the State party and abroad, including international operations of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Homeland Security Investigations offices, the Blue Lightening Initiative, Operation Angel Watch and the recent International Megan's Law to Prevent Child Exploitation and Other Sexual Crimes Through Advanced Notification of Travelling Sex Offenders enacted in February 2016. The Committee also notes that the 2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act has replaced the "reasonable belief" with "clear and convincing evidence" that the victim was at least 18 years old to be accepted as a legal defence for sex tourists. However, it is concerned that, despite the seemingly higher threshold, such provision falls short of absolute prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse of children. The Committee is also concerned that the State party lacks educational efforts about its laws against sexual exploitation of children aimed at travellers.

27. **The Committee recommends that the State party review its legislation with a view to amending any of its laws and regulations that would allow perpetrators to avoid liability for sexual exploitation of children, including by ensuring that "clear and convincing evidence" is not accepted as legal defence for persons travelling for the purpose of child sexual exploitation. The Committee also urges the State party to raise awareness of the public, in particular travellers, and conduct advocacy with the tourism industry on the harmful effects of child sex tourism, widely disseminate the World Tourism Organization Global Code of Ethics for Tourism among travel agents and tourism agencies, and encourage those enterprises to become signatories to the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.**

VI. Prohibition of the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution and related matters (arts. 3, 4 (2) and (3) and 5-7)

Existing criminal or penal laws and regulations

28. The Committee welcomes that the number of states that have adopted safe-harbour laws has increased, but is concerned that domestic legislation remains not fully in compliance with the Optional Protocol. In particular, the Committee remains concerned that:

(a) Federal law does not prohibit the sale of children per se but rather proscribes the sale of children for specific purposes, such as child prostitution, child pornography and adoption, and that not all states have enacted laws related to the sale of children;

(b) Child pornography is only considered a crime if expressed visually.

29. **The Committee reiterates its recommendation from the previous concluding observations (see CRC/C/OPSC/USA/CO/2, para. 34) that the State party:**

(a) **Define and explicitly prohibit all offences, in particular non-visual child pornography, with or without economic retribution, in accordance with articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol, at the federal level and in all states;**

(b) **Make all the offences under the Optional Protocol punishable by appropriate penalties that take into account their grave nature, both at the federal and state levels;**

(c) **Ensure that attempting to commit any of the offences covered by the Optional Protocol as well as complicity or participation therein are punished in conformity with article 3 (2) of the Optional Protocol.**

Sale of organs

30. The Committee regrets that the State party has not approved the Strategy to Oppose Predatory Organ Trafficking Act. In the light of the information provided by the State party in paragraph 68 of its report that, although United States state laws may not always criminalize the sale of organs per se, conduct prohibited by the Optional Protocol would necessarily fall within the scope of one or more state criminal statutes, the Committee is concerned that the absence of explicit prohibition of sale of children for the purpose of transfer of organs of the child for profit or the attempt to commit such an act might undermine the gravity of the crime and the sanctions prescribed.

31. **The Committee recommends that the State party redevelop and approve a new comprehensive strategy against trafficking of organs and review its legislation with the aim of prohibiting explicitly the sale of children for the purpose of transfer of organs of the child for profit or the attempt to commit as well as complicity and participation in such acts. The Committee also recommends that the sanctions prescribed for such crime should be commensurate to the gravity of the crime.**

Extraterritorial jurisdiction

32. The Committee reiterates its previous concerns (see CRC/C/OPSC/USA/CO/2, para. 39) that the State party's extraterritorial jurisdiction based on the nationality of the offender does not reach all offences covered by the Optional Protocol.

33. **The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (see CRC/C/OPSC/USA/CO/2, para. 40) that, in order to strengthen the framework for prosecution and punishment of those responsible for acts involving the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and child sex tourism, the State party establish its jurisdiction in all cases listed under article 4 of the Optional Protocol.**

Extradition

34. The Committee remains concerned that offences prohibited under the Optional Protocol are not considered to be included in extradition agreements with States that have not ratified the Optional Protocol and that no extraditions would be ruled in the absence of a bilateral agreement even if the other State has ratified the Optional Protocol. The Committee is also concerned that in all cases the State party continues to require double criminality.

35. **The Committee recommends that the State party remove the requirement of double criminality for extradition in respect of offences covered by the Optional Protocol and consider using the Optional Protocol as a legal basis for extradition in respect of such offences in cases where there is no bilateral extradition treaty with the other country concerned.**

VII. Protection of the rights of child victims (arts. 8 and 9 (3) and (4))

Measures adopted to protect the rights and interests of child victims of offences prohibited under the Optional Protocol

36. While noting the efforts made by the State party to assist victims of human trafficking, through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act and the Social Security Act, the Committee is concerned that such laws, as well as policies and procedures in place, do not provide for specialized services for child victims of trafficking and thus do not address their special needs. In addition, the laws and policies fail to address needs and services for victims of offences, other than trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The Committee is also concerned about:

(a) Lack of shelters and underfunding of services resulting in inappropriate placements of child victims, even returning them to unsafe home environments;

(b) Children continuing to being legally arrested, detained and prosecuted for prostitution in the majority of states that have not passed safe harbour-type laws protecting child victims from arrest, and that, even in those states that have passed such laws, arrest and prosecution still occur owing to gaps and weaknesses therein;

(c) Denial of services for child victims of exploitation who consented to prostitution and hence the lack of protection, reintegration and rehabilitation services to child victims of exploitation involved in prostitution;

(d) Limited progress in providing targeted services to child pornography victims, including physical and psychological recovery and rehabilitation services and the absence of a department or agency responsible for such services;

(e) Lack of legal representation for child pornography victims by an attorney and the lack of incentives for such victims to seek restitution or compensation;

(f) Insufficient support, monitoring and evaluation by the State party of services provided by NGOs to child victims of sexual exploitation.

37. **In the light of article 9 (3) of the Optional Protocol, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Review and amend its legislation, policies and procedures to distinguish between adult and child victims of offences and provide specialized services for child victims of all offences under the Optional Protocol;**

(b) **Legally and effectively decriminalize the involvement of children in prostitution, ensuring that no state law on prostitution allows for the arrest and detention of sexually exploited children and that the upper age for protection of child victims is set at 18 years throughout the State party's territory;**

(c) **Pass safe-harbour laws in all states that have not yet done so to ensure that prostituted children are protected and not arrested or detained, and provide training and funding for the promotion and application of such laws;**

(d) **Consider adopting similar safe-harbour laws for children coerced or forced to engage in other forms of criminal activity where there is an economic and non-economic remuneration in exchange for children's services via criminal acts;**

(e) **Increase resources allocated for services targeting child victims of offences under the Optional Protocol and ensure sufficient and appropriate shelter for immediate relief and long-term services, especially family reunification, when appropriate, or placement in family settings for their full physical and psychological recovery;**

(f) **Provide child victims with a legal representative throughout the criminal and judicial process who will defend his or her interests and will seek restitution and adequate compensation on his or her behalf;**

(g) **Provide support to NGOs that provide services to child victims of all offences under the Optional Protocol and undertake regular monitoring and evaluation of services provided to such victims.**

Unaccompanied foreign children, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants

38. The Committee notes that the number of unaccompanied children arriving at the borders of the State party has risen significantly in recent years and welcomes the measures taken by the State party to address the situation, including the Central American Minors Programme and the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Programme. However, the Committee is concerned that:

(a) Despite the guarantees of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, customs and border protection officers have reportedly returned many children victims of trafficking or at risk of trafficking to Mexico;

(b) The Central American Minors Programme is restricted to children with parents in current lawful status in the State party and is not based on children's protection needs;

(c) Although legal representation of unaccompanied children is envisaged under the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, the majority of children have no representation in their deportation proceedings;

(d) The streamlined release procedures, permitting the release of unaccompanied children to sponsors without proper background checks, have reportedly led to numerous cases of trafficking and exploitation of children by their sponsors.

39. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Continue training its customs and border protection officers to identify, detect and protect children who are victims or may be at risk of becoming victims of the offences under the Optional Protocol and establish mechanisms for monitoring screenings and interviews with children;**

(b) **Review and expand its Central American Minors Programme in order to provide access to its territory to children with a parent in the United States regardless of the parent's immigration status or to children with close adult relatives in the United States, with the aim of reducing their vulnerability to offences under the Optional Protocol;**

(c) **Provide access to legal counselling to all unaccompanied children to challenge their deportation or to submit their claim for protection;**

(d) **Ensure careful background checks to all persons who claim custody or care of unaccompanied children, including the sponsors, and carry out systematic monitoring of their living and care conditions.**

Criminal justice system protection measures

40. The Committee welcomes a number of training initiatives — mentioned in the State party report and the replies to the list of issues — provided to the judiciary to create awareness of the unique needs of child exploitation victims. However, it remains concerned that children are often required to testify in open court in front of their traffickers or pimps.

41. **The Committee recommends that the State party continue and strengthen its training programmes aimed at the judiciary, prosecutors and law enforcement officers on child-sensitive justice procedures and victims and witness protection standards, bearing in mind the best interests of the child throughout the proceedings. It also recommends that the State party use child victim/witness testimonies via video recording or other means to avoid revictimization of the child, and that it identify and further develop best practices at the federal and state levels.**

VIII. International assistance and cooperation (art. 10)

Multilateral, bilateral and regional agreements

42. **In the light of article 10 (1) of the Optional Protocol, the Committee encourages the State party to continue to strengthen international cooperation through multilateral, regional and bilateral arrangements, especially with neighbouring countries, including by strengthening procedures for and mechanisms to coordinate the implementation of such arrangements, with a view to improving prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution and punishment of those responsible for any of the offences covered under the Optional Protocol.**

IX. Ratification of the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure

43. **The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.**

X. Implementation and reporting

A. Follow-up and dissemination

44. **The Committee recommends that the State party take all appropriate measures to ensure that the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations are fully implemented, including by transmitting them to the President, Congress, members of the Cabinet, Executive Departments, Agencies and the Judiciary for appropriate consideration and further action.**

45. **The Committee recommends that the report and the written replies to the list of issues submitted by the State party and the present concluding observations be made widely available, including through the Internet, to the public at large, civil society organizations, youth groups, professional groups and children, in order to generate debate on and awareness of the Optional Protocol and its implementation and monitoring.**

B. Next periodic report

46. **In accordance with article 12 (2) of the Optional Protocol, the Committee requests the State party to include further information on the implementation of the Optional Protocol and the present concluding observations in its fifth periodic report, due on 23 January 2022.**